

## NEWS UPDATE

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs  
South Dakota Department of the Military

January 11, 2018



### VA REVISES REGULATIONS ON REIMBURSEMENT FOR EMERGENCY TREATMENT OF VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has, through a Federal Register notice, revised its regulations concerning payment or reimbursement for emergency treatment for non-service connected conditions at non-VA facilities.

The VA will begin processing claims for reimbursement of reasonable costs that were only partially paid by the veteran's other health insurance (OHI). Those costs may include hospital charges, professional fees and emergency transportation, such as ambulances.

This change comes on the heels of an earlier announcement that the VA was taking immediate action to address delayed payments to community providers.

Effective Jan. 9, the VA updated a portion of its regulations in response to an April 2016 U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims decision that stated VA could no longer deny reimbursement when OHI pays a portion of the treatment expenses.

The VA will apply the updated regulations to claims pending with the VA on or after April 8, 2016, and to new claims. By law, the VA still may not reimburse veterans for the costs of copayments, cost shares and deductibles required by their OHI.

The VA will work directly with community providers to get additional information needed to review and process these claims. Previous claims do not have to be resubmitted unless requested by the VA.



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## VA SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON PROGRAM OF COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it is seeking public comments on how it can further strengthen and improve caregiver support through the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC).

Through a Federal Register notice, the VA announced a 30-day comment period to hear from stakeholders on whether and how PCAFC should be refined to support veterans and their family caregivers.

“With this opportunity, the VA is following through on our promise to provide better service and improve consistency for the program,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “We’ve heard participants’ concerns and encourage them to share their personal experiences and perspectives to help us make changes.”

The VA will use feedback, requested through responses to questions, to guide any future regulatory modifications to support family caregivers of veterans most in need, while also improving the program under the current law.

Through PCAFC, the VA provides support for certain family caregivers of eligible veterans seriously injured in the line of duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, including a monthly stipend, access to health-care for eligible caregivers, counseling, training and respite care.

More information about the VA Caregiver Support Program is available at

[www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov).

## USD STUDENTS VISIT SDDVA

Students from the University of South Dakota Political Science class visited the South



Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs this week. Secretary Zimmerman had the distinct honor to visit with them about our great heroes.

## PENNINGTON COUNTY RECOGNIZES VETERAN FOR HIS SERVICE

Pennington County Veterans Service Officers Alex Purcell and Thomas Vallette hosted a recognition ceremony for James Varnadoe.

James was presented the US-ROC Mutual Defense Commemorative Badge on behalf of the Republic of China government, in recognition of his service and contributions in securing Taiwan and keeping our nation safe during the Cold War.

SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman and Field Service Officer Will Huffman were on hand for the ceremony and thanked James and his wife for their service.



*L to R: Zimmerman, Huffman, Purcell, Varnadoe and his wife, and Vallette.*



*Mobile Vet Center on the road again!*

## MOBILE VET CENTERS TO VIST SPINK AND BEADLE COUNTIES

Veterans and their families are invited to Veterans Outreach events in Spink and Beadle Counties.

Doug McCuddin of Sioux Falls and Jeff Gorr out of Rapid City, Outreach Specialists with the Vet Centers, will be on hand to provide “Combat” Veterans with information on Vet Center counseling services and referral materials to other VA and community agencies. They will be bringing their 38’ Mobile Vet Center to meet in a confidential/private environment.

Logistics for the outreach events are as follows:

January 17—American Legion Post (Main Street) in Redfield from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm (CT).

January 18—Beadle County Courthouse (450 3rd Street SW) in Huron from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm (CT).

The Vet Center Program was established by Congress in 1979 out of the recognition that a significant number of Vietnam era vets were still experiencing readjustment problems. Vet Centers are community based and part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The goal of the Vet Center program is to provide a broad range of individual and group counseling, marriage and family counseling, outreach, and referral services to eligible veterans in order to help them make a satisfying post-war readjustment to civilian life.

## SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS COMMISSION

The South Dakota Veterans Commission met in Pierre this week.

The Commissioners heard reports from numerous partners and the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, they had a briefing from the South Dakota Veterans Council on the proposed State Veterans Cemetery for eastern South Dakota.

Among other actions, the Commission members present, voted unanimously to support the efforts of the South Dakota Veterans Council to construct a State Veterans Cemetery in eastern South Dakota.



## VA BECOMES FIRST HOSPITAL SYSTEM TO RELEASE OPIOID PRESCRIBING RATES

U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Dr. David J. Shulkin announced that VA has begun [publicly posting information](#) on opioids dispensed from VA pharmacies, along with VA's strategies to prescribe these pain medications appropriately and safely.

With this announcement, the VA becomes the only health-care system in the country to post information on its opioid-prescribing rates.

The disclosure is part of the VA's promise of transparency to veterans and the American people, and builds on the VA's strong record of transparency disclosures — including on wait times, accountability actions, employee settlements and the Secretary's travel — under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump over the past year.

"Many veterans enrolled in the VA health-care system suffer from high rates of chronic pain and the prescribing of opioids may be necessary medically," Secretary Shulkin said. "And while the VA offers other pain-management options to reduce the need for opioids, it is important that we are transparent on how we prescribe opioids, so veterans and the public can see what we are doing in our facilities and the progress we have made over time."

Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway said, "Declaring the opioid crisis a nationwide public health emergency was a call to action by the President. His administration is exploring all tools and authorities within their agencies to address this complex challenge costing lives. Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. Shulkin is heeding that call; the VA is now the first hospital system in the country to post information on its opioid prescribing rates. This is an innovative way to raise awareness, increase transparency and mitigate the dangers of over-prescribing."

The interactive map shows data over a five-year period (2012-2017) and does not include veterans' personal information. The posted information shows opioid-dispensing rates for each facility and how much those rates have changed over time.

It is important to note that because the needs and conditions of veterans may be different at each facility, rates may also be different for that reason, and cannot be compared directly.

The prescribing rate information will be updated semi-annually, on January 15 and July 15 of each year.

As a learning health system using the current best evidence to learn and improve, the VA continually develops and refines best practices for the care of veterans. Releasing this data will facilitate the sharing of best practices in pain management and opioid prescribing among doctors and medical center directors.

Highlights from the data include:

- A 41-percent drop in opioid-prescribing rates across the VA between 2012 and 2017
- Ninety-nine percent of facilities decreased their prescribing rates.
- San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Cleveland, Ohio, top the list of medical centers with the lowest prescribing rates, at 3%.
- El Paso, Texas, and Fayetteville, North Carolina, are most improved, and decreased prescribing rates by more than 60 percent since 2012. El Paso's prescribing rate decreased by 66%, and Fayetteville's decreased by 65%.

The VA currently uses a multifaceted approach to reduce the need for the use of opioids among veterans. Since 2012, the Opioid Safety Initiative has focused on the safe use and slow and steady decrease in VA opioid dispensing. The VA also uses other therapies, including physical therapy and complementary and integrative health alternatives, such as meditation, yoga and cognitive-behavioral therapy.

## VA FACILITIES NOW OFFER SAME-DAY CARE FOR URGENT PRIMARY AND MENTAL HEALTH-CARE NEEDS

Same-day services means a Veteran with an urgent need for primary care and mental health-care receives services that may include: a face-to-face visit with a clinician; advice provided during a call with a nurse; a telehealth or video care visit; an appointment made with a specialist; or a prescription filled the same day, depending upon what best meets the needs of the Veteran.

“We made a commitment to our nation’s Veterans that we would work to reduce wait times and improve access, and we are doing it,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “We were able to meet this goal, in large part, because of the concerted focus of our staff who care for our Veterans in facilities across the country.”

Since 2014, VA has concentrated its efforts on improving access and meeting the urgent health-care needs of Veterans. In 2016, all of VA’s medical centers offered same-day services for primary and mental health services.

In addition to offering same-day services, VA has reduced patient wait times. VA also implemented a new process to ensure timely follow-up appointments for time-sensitive medical needs. More than 100,000 such appointments have been completed.

In 2017, Veterans completed over 57.5 million appointments and VA clinicians saw almost 6 million patients.

To view access information about each facility nationwide, visit <https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/>. The information provided at this link is not offered by any major national hospital organization in the country.

## VETERANS COUNCIL AND SDDVA HOST LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION

The South Dakota Veterans Council and the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs held their annual legislative reception this week.

Legislators were briefed on Department legislative issues, as well as issues that the Veterans Service Organizations were supporting.

In addition, legislators shared constituent legislation that they were considering sponsoring.

Both the Department and the Council appreciate the time that the legislators take out of their busy schedule to attend this event.





## Kick Off the New Year

Serving Those Who Served

# Veterans' Holiday Relief Drive

Benefiting homeless and at-risk Veterans and Military Families



Hosted by the

## Department of South Dakota American Legion Auxiliary

### Welcoming Buddy Baskets and Buddy Bags

**Buddy Basket Home-Warming Welcome Recipe:** Assemble a Laundry Basket/Waste Basket filled with: Paper Towels, Laundry Detergent, Household Cleansers, Rubber Gloves, Cleaning Sponges, Dust Pan w/Hand Brush, Light Bulbs, Flashlight, Batteries, Alarm Clock, Shower Curtain w/Rings, Bath Towel Set, Bathroom Tissue, Dishes, Eating Utensils, Dish Soap; Dish Towel Set  
– Frosted with clear wrap, bow, and greeting tag

**Buddy Bag Thank A Hero Recipe:** Assemble a Bag filled with: Personal Hygiene Products, Hand Towel Set, Shower Shoes or Slippers, Socks, Hat, Scarf and Gloves; Shopping or Salon Gift Card  
– Sealed with a note or card of appreciation

**Substitute, Homemade or Single Essential Items Welcome:** Sleeping Bags, Bedding, Warm Apparel, Small Appliances, Thermos, Bottled Water, Sun Screen, Lip Balm, Bus Pass; Pre-Paid Phone/Card

**Monetary Donations:** Checks payable and mailed to:  
Dept. of SD American Legion Auxiliary, Attn: VHRD  
129 North Main Avenue • Hartford, SD 57033

### SD Drop-Off Locations - Through January 31, 2018

**Aberdeen:** Area Chamber of Commerce • 516 S Main Street  
**Sioux Falls:** American Legion Post 15 • 1701 W Legion Drive  
**Vermillion:** The Broadcaster/Plain Talk • 201 W Cherry Street  
**Yankton:** Yankton Elks Lodge #994 • 504 W 27th Street  
**Mitchell:** American Legion Post 18 • 107 N Main Street  
**Hot Springs:** American Legion Post 71 • 1045 Jennings Avenue  
**Rapid City:** Cornerstone Rescue Mission • 30 Main Street  
*(Earmark Donation • VHRD - VetsWing)*  
**Spearfish:** Area Chamber of Commerce • 106 W Kansas Street;  
 Black Hills Pioneer • 315 Seaton Circle

For Additional Drop-Off Locations/Information Contact:  
 Autumn Simunek via VeteransHRD@gmail.com, call 605.890.3093  
 or visit SDLegionaux.org



Thank you for contributing to  
 South Dakota's Veteran Outreach Programs!  
 Serving Veterans, their Families and their Communities



## SDHDA PRO-VIDES FUNDS TO ENGAGE LAND-LORDS

South Dakota Housing Development Authority's (SDHDA) Board of Commissioners approved \$400,000 to provide funding for the Sustainable Housing Incentive Program (SHIP) – a collaborative effort of housing and service providers creating opportunity for tenants to gain self-sufficiency.

"It is often difficult to find affordable rental housing, it is even more difficult when you have barriers such as a criminal background, poor credit or no landlord references," said Executive Director Mark Lauseng. "By providing a financial incentive for landlords and coordinating services, this program can provide sustainable permanent housing for some of our most vulnerable citizens, giving them a second chance to be successful."

Eligible tenants are those enrolled in self-sufficiency and self-enrichment programs offered by service providers. The tenants are usually considered "high-risk" and are at a disadvantage in housing markets due to criminal records, evictions, poor credit, or frequent homelessness. Landlords, who partner with service providers to give tenants a second chance, can be reimbursed for damages or expenses, should they occur.

Agencies providing social services or coordinating services are eligible to apply for SHIP funding by completing the SHIP application found on SDHDA's website at [www.sdhda.org](http://www.sdhda.org).

For more information, contact Lorraine Polak at 605.773.3181 or [lorraine@sdhda.org](mailto:lorraine@sdhda.org).

## **PRESIDENT TRUMP SIGNS EXECUTIVE ORDER TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR VETERANS TRANSITIONING FROM ACTIVE DUTY TO CIVILIAN LIFE**

President Donald J. Trump signed an Executive Order titled, “Supporting Our Veterans During Their Transition From Uniformed Service to Civilian Life.” This Executive Order directs the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security to develop a plan to ensure that all new veterans receive mental health care for at least one year following their separation from service.

The three departments will work together and develop a Joint Action Plan to ensure that the 60 percent of new veterans who currently do not qualify for enrollment in healthcare — primarily due to lack of verified service connection related to the medical issue at hand — will receive treatment and access to services for mental health care for one year following their separation from service.

“As service members transition to veteran status, they face higher risk of suicide and mental health difficulties,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin. “During this critical phase, many transitioning service members may not qualify for enrollment in health care. The focus of this Executive Order is to coordinate federal assets to close that gap.”

The Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security will work to expand mental health programs and other resources to new veterans to the year following departure from uniformed service, including eliminating prior time limits and:

- Expanding peer community outreach and group sessions in the VA Whole Health initiative from 18 Whole Health Flagship facilities to all facilities. Whole Health includes wellness and establishing individual health goals.
- Extending the Department of Defense’s “Be There Peer Support Call and Outreach Center” services to provide peer support for veterans in the year following separation from the uniformed service.
- Expanding the Department of Defense’s Military One Source (MOS), which offers resources to active duty members, to include services to separating service members to one year beyond service separation.

“We look forward to continuing our partnership with the VA to ensure veterans who have served our country continue to receive the important mental health care and services they need and deserve,” said Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis.

“The Department of Homeland Security is where many veterans find a second opportunity to serve their country—nearly 28 percent of our workforce has served in the armed forces, in addition to the 49,000 active duty members of the United States Coast Guard,” said Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen.

“This critically important executive order will provide our service members with the support they need as they transition to civilian life. These dedicated men and women have put their lives on the line to protect our nation and our American way of life, and we owe them a debt we can never repay. We look forward to working with the VA and DOD to implement the President’s EO,” said Secretary Nielsen.

“In signing this Executive Order, President Trump has provided clear guidance to further ensure our veterans and their families know that we are focusing on ways to improve their ability to move forward and achieve their goals in life after service,” said Secretary Shulkin.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

2018

Jan 16—Black Hills State University Military/Veterans Appreciation Night—Young Center—5:30 pm (MT)  
Jan 17—SD American Legion Legislative Reception—Post 8—Pierre—5:30 pm (CT)  
Jan 17—American Legion Post (Main Street) in Redfield from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm (CT).  
Jan 18—Beadle County Courthouse (450 3rd Street SW) in Huron from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm (CT).  
Jan 28-29—VFW Legislative Conference—Ft. Pierre AmericInn  
Jan 29—VFW Legislative Reception—AmericInn—Ft. Pierre—6:00 pm—7:30 pm (CT)  
Feb 16-18—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma  
Feb 23-25—Vietnam Veterans & Era Reunion—Ramada Inn—Mitchell  
Mar 4-8—National VFW Conference—Washington, DC  
Apr 27-29—DAV State Convention—The Lodge—Deadwood  
Jun 7-10—American Legion State Convention—Spearfish  
Jun 14-17—VFW State Convention—Sioux Falls  
Jul 14-17—DAV National Convention—Reno, NV  
Jul 21-25—VFW National Convention—Kansas City, MO  
Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre  
Aug 20-24—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN

## SOUTH DAKOTA HOMELESS COUNT

Annual Homeless count will be conducted January 23, 2018.

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